



# Nutrient Management

## Conservation Practice Job Sheet

590

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

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Landowner \_\_\_\_\_



### Definition

Nutrient management is managing the source, rate, form, timing, and placement of nutrients.

### Purpose

Nutrient management effectively and efficiently uses scarce nutrient resources to adequately supply soils and plants to produce food, forage, fiber, and cover while minimizing environmental degradation.

### Where Used

Nutrient management is applicable to all lands where plant nutrients and soil amendments are applied.

### Conservation Management Systems

Nutrient management may be a component of a conservation management system. It is used in conjunction with Crop Rotation, Residue Management, Pest Management, conservation buffer practices, and/or other practices needed on a site-specific basis to address natural resource concerns and the landowner's objectives. The major role of nutrient management is to minimize nutrient losses from fields, thus helping protect surface and ground water supplies.

### Nutrient Management Planning

Nutrient management components of the conservation plan will include the following information:

- field map and soil map
- crop rotation or sequence
- results of soil, water, plant, and organic material samples analyses
- expected yield
- sources of nutrients to be applied
- nutrient budget, including credits of nutrients available
- recommended nutrient rates, form, timing, and method of application
- location of designated sensitive areas
- guidelines for operation and maintenance

Nutrient management is most effective when used with other agronomic practices, such as cover and green manure crops, residue management, conservation buffers, water management, pest management, and crop rotation.



## General Nutrient Management Considerations

- Test soil, plants, water and organic material for nutrient content.
- Set realistic yield goals.
- Apply nutrients according to soil test recommendations.
- Account for nutrient credits from all sources.
- Consider effects of drought or excess moisture on quantities of available nutrients.
- Use a water budget to guide timing of nutrient applications.
- Use cover and green manure crops where possible to recover and retain residual nitrogen and other nutrients between cropping periods.
- Use split applications of nitrogen fertilizer for greater nutrient efficiency.

## Guidelines for Operation and Maintenance

- Review nutrient management component of the conservation plan annually and make adjustments when needed.
- Calibrate application equipment to ensure uniform distribution and accurate application rates.
- Protect nutrient storage areas from weather to minimize runoff and leakage.
- Avoid unnecessary exposure to fertilizer and organic waste, and wear protective clothing when necessary.
- Observe setbacks required for nutrient applications adjacent to waterbodies, drainageways, and other sensitive areas.
- Maintain records of nutrient application as required by state and local regulations.
- Clean up residual material from equipment and dispose of properly.

## Nutrient Management Assessment

Make a site-specific environmental assessment of the potential risk of nutrient management. The boundary of the nutrient management assessment is the agricultural management zone (AMZ), which is defined as the edge of field, bottom of root zone, and top of crop canopy. Environmental risk is difficult to assess beyond the AMZ.

Within an area designated as having impaired or protected natural resources (soil, water, air, plants, and animals), the nutrient management plan should include an assessment of the potential risk for nitrogen and phosphorus to contribute to water quality impairment.

The Leaching Index (LI), Nitrogen Leaching and Economic Analysis Package (NLEAP), the Phosphorus Index (PI), erosion prediction models, water quality monitoring, or any other acceptable assessment tools may be used to make risk assessments.

Evaluate other areas that might have high levels of nutrients, produced or applied, that may contribute to environmental degradation. For example, areas with high livestock concentrations or large areas of high-intensity cropping, such as continuous potatoes, corn, or specialty crops, may be contributing heavy nutrient loads to surface or ground water.

Conservation practices and management techniques will be implemented with nutrient management to mitigate any unacceptable risks.



